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ABSTRACT

Project Path, at Illinois' College of DuPage, was established to provide pre-employment training and career counseling for disabled students. This guide describes the project's goals, clientele, and procedures to provide a model for preparing disabled postsecondary students for competitive employment. The first section provides background information on the project and its goals, indicating that services focus on counseling and academic advising, health and special services, a developmental learning lab/skills center, testing, and career services. The second section provides demographic data on the population served by Project Path, including gender and type of disability, age, and ethnicity by gender. The third section describes the process employed by Project Path to serve students, including individual intake and assessment, ongoing counseling, referral to appropriate services, tutoring, pre-employment skills training, and cooperative education experiences; employers, such as 1-day seminars on legal and employment issues, teleconferences on disability issues, one-on-one conferencing with the project path employment marketing coordinator, worksite visits, and resource materials; faculty members, including in-service seminars and resource materials for modifying instruction for disabled students; and cooperating agencies, primarily through group presentations to establish connections with the agencies. The final section focuses on marketing strategies employed by the project, such as collaboration with on-campus offices, presenting Project Path to supportive community agencies, disseminating information to students through classroom presentations, holding new student orientation sessions, and designing print and video marketing materials. (TGI)

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ED 388 366

PROJECT PATH GUIDE TO PREPARING POSTSECONDARY STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FOR COMPETITIVE EMPLOYMENT

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INTRODUCTION

The Problem

America's workforce is in a state of dramatic transition. As discussed factually in *Workforce 2000*, the nation's work and workers will be very different in the future. One major trend summarized by the Hudson Institute study in its Executive Summary indicates:

> The workforce will grow slowly, becoming older, more female, and more disadvantaged. Only 15 percent of the new entrants to the labor force over the next nine years will be native white males, compared to 47 percent in that category today (Johnston and Packer, 1987).

Another trend projects:

> The new jobs in service industries will demand much higher skill levels than the jobs of today. The demographic trends in the workforce, coupled with the higher skill requirements of the economy, will lead to both higher and lower employment: more joblessness among the least-skilled and less among the most educationally advantaged (Johnston and Packer, 1987).

Although the disabled population is not addressed directly in the job projections of *Workforce 2000*, clearly the changes predicted in America's work and workforce hold the potential to have an even more negative impact on people with disabilities, estimated to be from 7-12 percent of the total population. The United States has over 3.5 million disabled people, as indicated by the National Center for Health Statistics, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (World Almanac and Book of Facts, 1983). Many of these people receive some type of government support or assistance, including vocational rehabilitation. However, of the more than one million people served by vocational rehabilitation in 1981, according to the 1984 Bureau of Census, only approximately 25 percent were reported as rehabilitated and gainfully employed (Combs and Omvig, 1986).

Further, although federal legislation seeks to assure handicapped persons equal educational opportunity, it has been cited that 40 percent of disabled adults are employed as compared to 74 percent of non-disabled people (Levinson, 1984). According to 1982 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services statistics, of severely disabled persons, only an estimated 14 percent of adults of working age are employed in the nation's labor force, and only 2 percent in a full-time capacity (Poole, 1987).

Given these facts and the predictions that occupations of the future will require more education and good-paying, low-skilled jobs will decline, the need for a comprehensive education model that leads to employment for postsecondary disabled students becomes even more acute. Of necessity, such a model should develop the individual potentials of disabled students to contribute to the workforce in more productive ways. To tap these students' potentials, programs should be designed to prepare a greater portion of the disabled population for career employment that responds and relates to both their realistic, career-oriented, postsecondary education plans and to the changing needs of employers.

Both secondary and postsecondary disabled students need to understand their "SWIS", an acronym which means individual **strengths** and **weaknesses**, the educational **institution** they attend, and the **services** that institution can offer (Cowen, 1985). Like other minority groups who are much less successful in the labor market, those with disabilities require an approach consistent with their strengths, weaknesses, and special needs and with current workforce trends. An optimum approach would also identify how to coordinate existing systems of support within an educational institution in a cost-effective way. The purpose of such a program is to prepare the disabled for self-sufficiency at a time when "relative rates of unemployment and earnings have not improved during the past decade and may be becoming worse" (Johnston and Packer, 1987).

In addition, as a result of these changes in work and the workforce, the economics of business will require employers to become increasingly effective in integrating special populations, including women, minorities, and the disabled, into the employed population. Diversity training for women and minorities needs to be expanded to include people with disabilities. The whole issue of how to deal with disability raises many fears, for every person is at risk of becoming disabled. Therefore, given this universal possibility, there is a need for peers, employers, supervisors, and educators to continue to become more sensitized to the capabilities and needs of disabled individuals.

People with disabilities, perhaps more than any other group of postsecondary job seekers, experience difficulty in locating, securing and holding meaningful, career-related jobs in competitive employment situations. On the one hand, projections indicate employment competition will only intensify in the future, making it even more difficult for persons with special needs; while on the other hand, a body of evidence indicates that disabled persons who receive instruction in job-seeking skills along with an expectation for conducting an individual, independent job search are more successful in gaining and maintaining career-related jobs than those who do not receive pre-employment training.

A Solution to the Problem

College of DuPage sought to address these issues and the need for pre-employment training and career counseling for disabled students through Project Path. The project addressed how to achieve career goals for students with disabilities by coordinating established services in five areas:

- Counseling and Academic Advising
- Health and Special Services
- Developmental Learning Lab/Skills Center
- Testing
- Career Services

and linking them to the college's Cooperative Education program for the purpose of enabling disabled students to enter and leave Project Path with defined career paths and employment futures related directly to their academic courses of study.

A central administrative function to expedite career employment of disabled postsecondary students was established. As a career employment project, it was an alternative to the more narrowly focused community programs. It offered support in both academic and workplace settings and combined three essential elements--academic preparation, pre-employment training, and a cooperative education experience which would serve as a transitional element--enabling students to

OUR GOALS

The following four goals were defined in our efforts to address the needs of disabled postsecondary students at the college:

- To plan, establish and implement a career-oriented competitive employment program for postsecondary students with disabilities
- To develop and offer a pre-employment training curriculum to prepare postsecondary students with disabilities for competitive employment
- To place postsecondary students with disabilities in cooperative education jobs directly related to their programs of study
- To establish an on-line College of DuPage Employment Job Matching System

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

In addition to the college staff and services, Project Path students had access to specialists in several community agencies which offered support as needed for special issues. Coordination, referrals and support came from the following agencies:

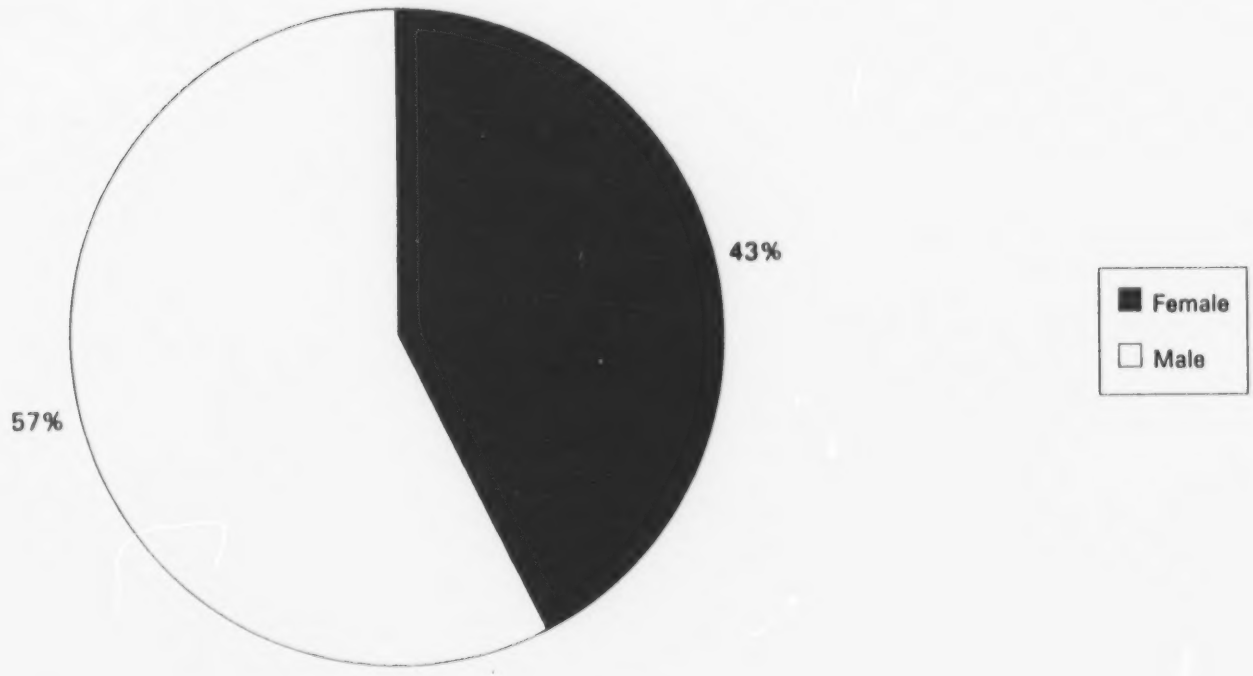
- Veterans Administration Rehabilitation Program
- Marionjoy Rehabilitation Center
- Catholic Charities
- Bureau of the Blind
- DuPage PIC Job Training Office
- Illinois Assistive Technology Project
- Illinois Department of Employment Security Job Service Office
- DuPage County Department of Rehabilitation Services
- District secondary schools
- Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA)
- Illinois Department of Rehabilitation Services
- Local organizations dealing with support and employment of people with disabilities

The People We Served

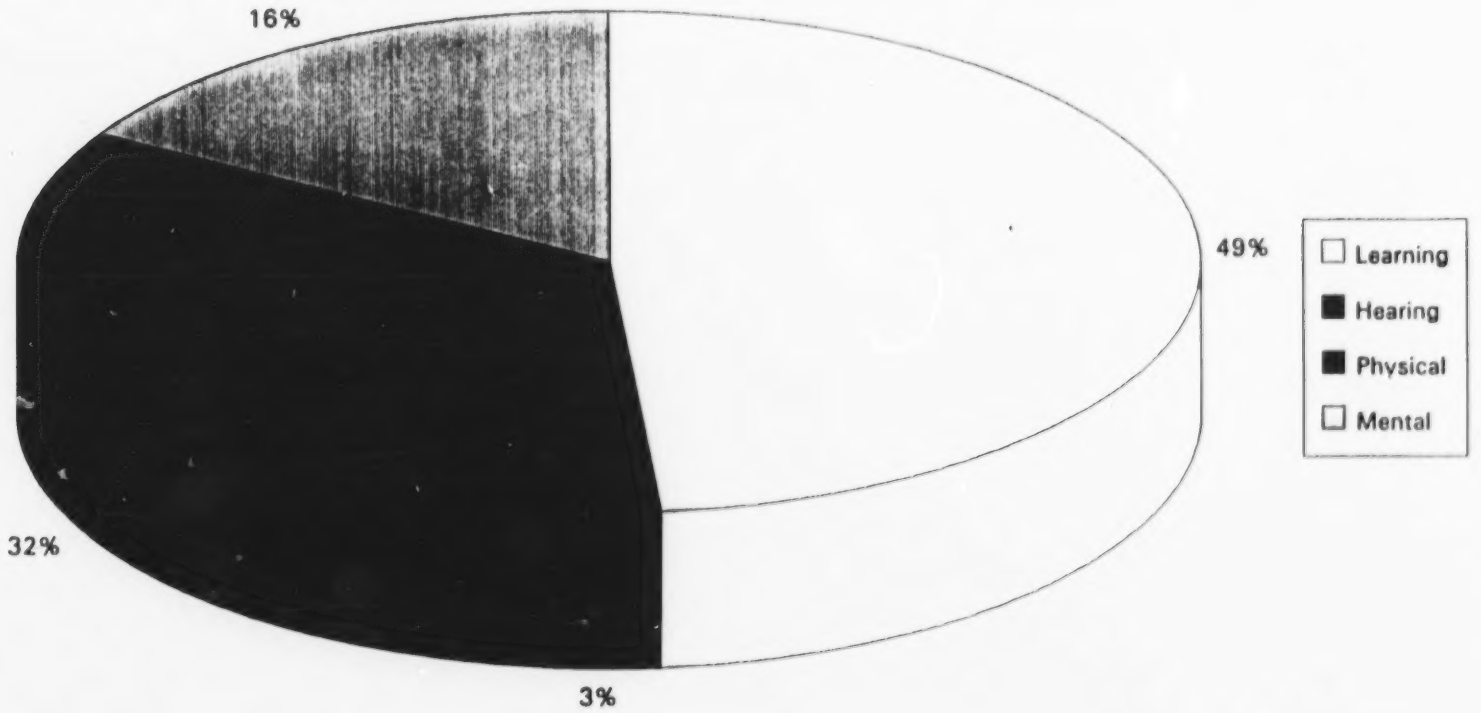
STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Following are the demographics charts for the students we served through Project Path:

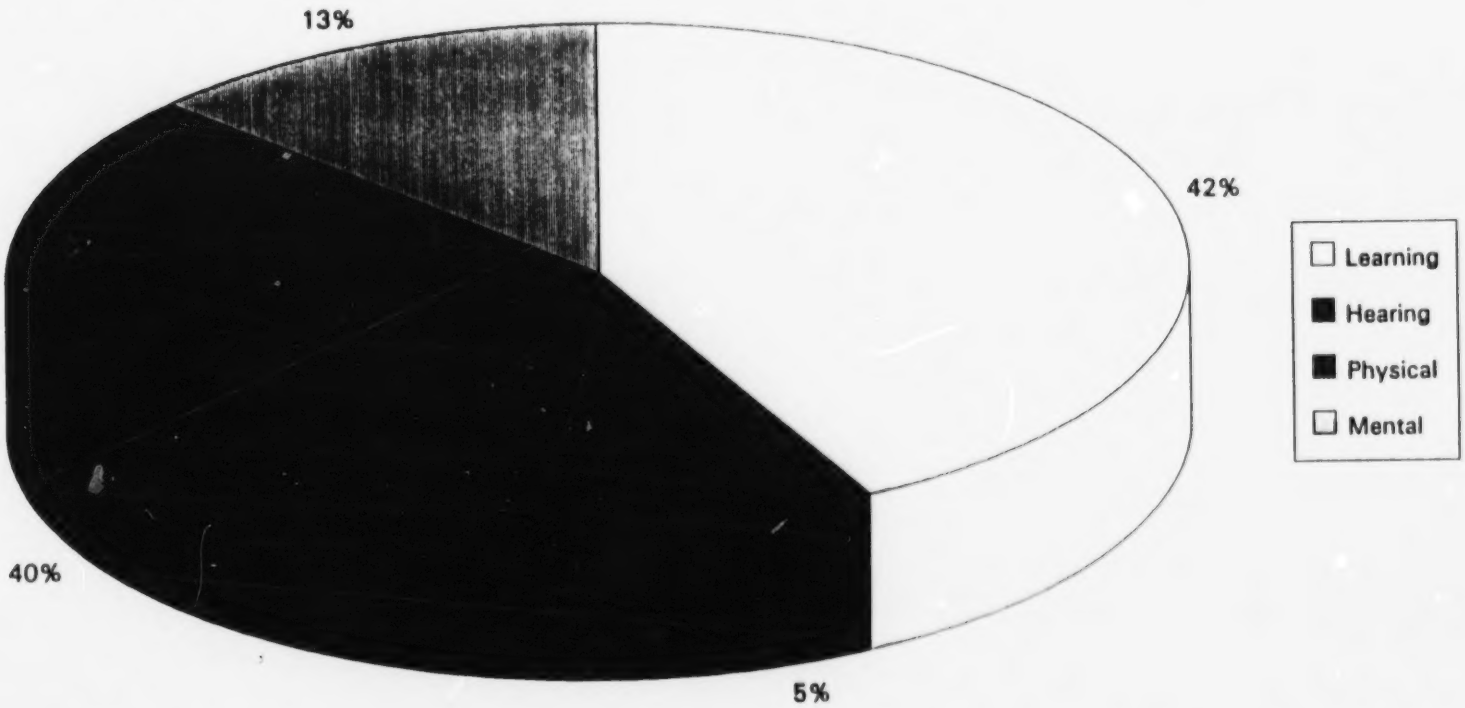
Student Gender Profile



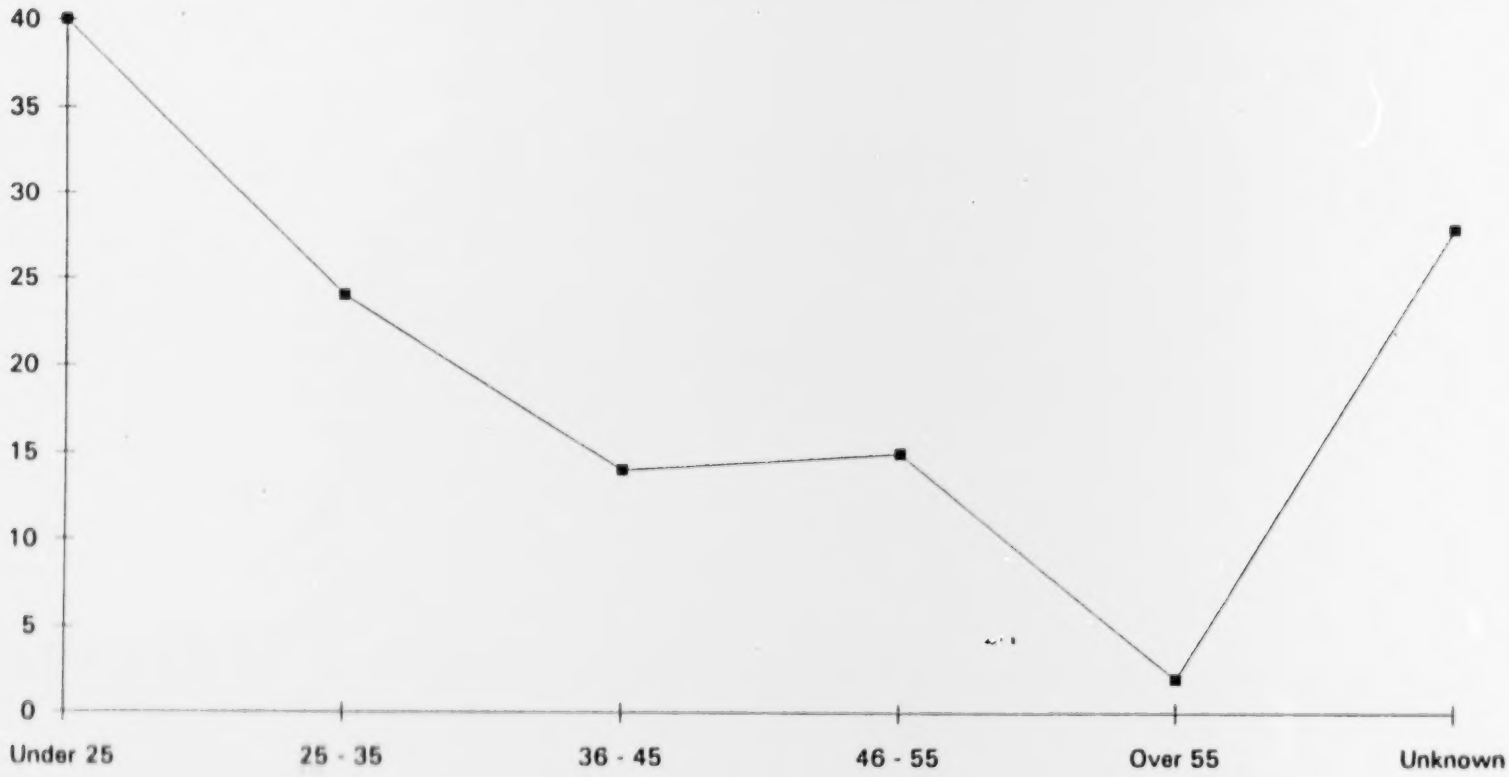
Disabilities Profile of Female Students



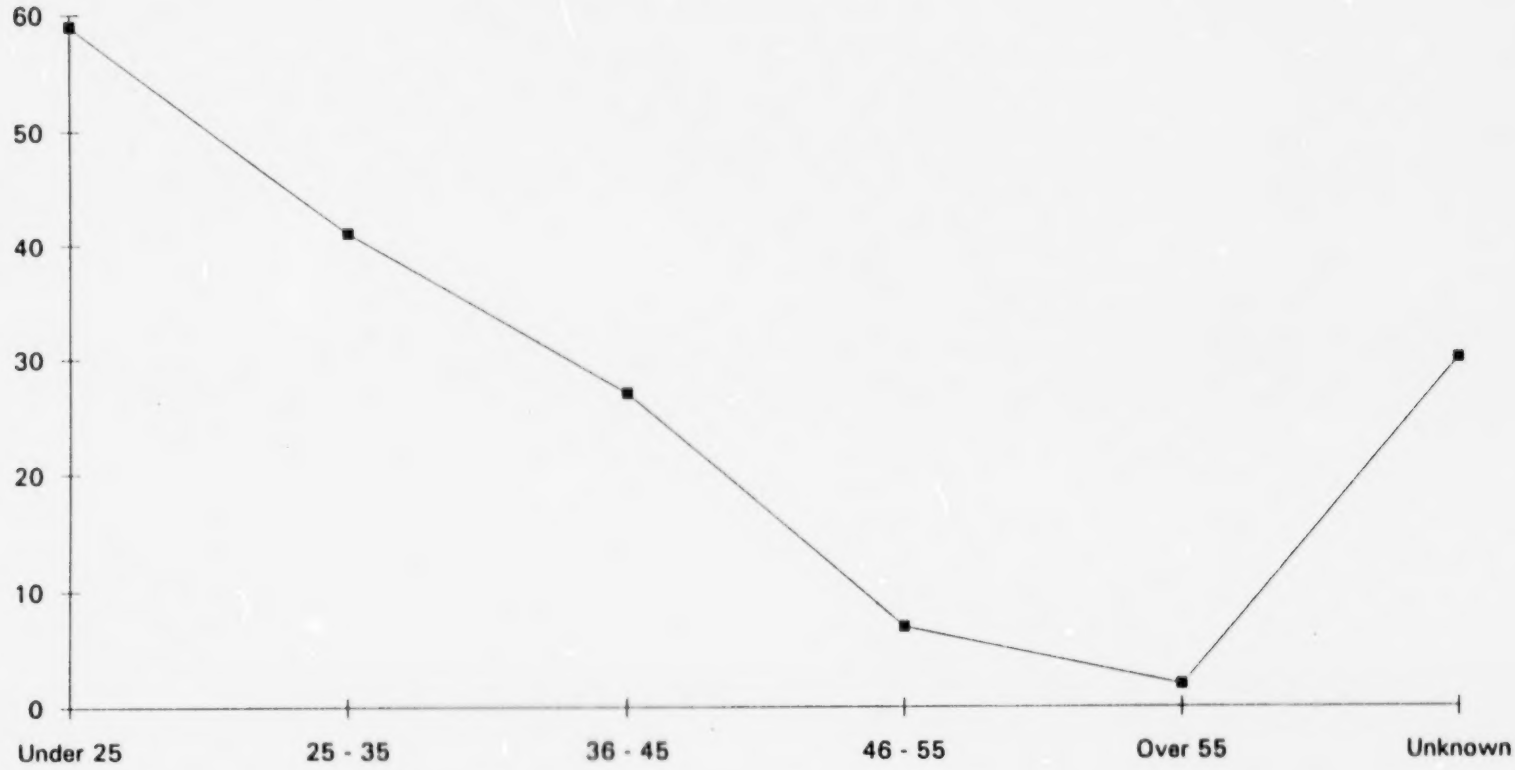
Disabilities Profile of Male Students



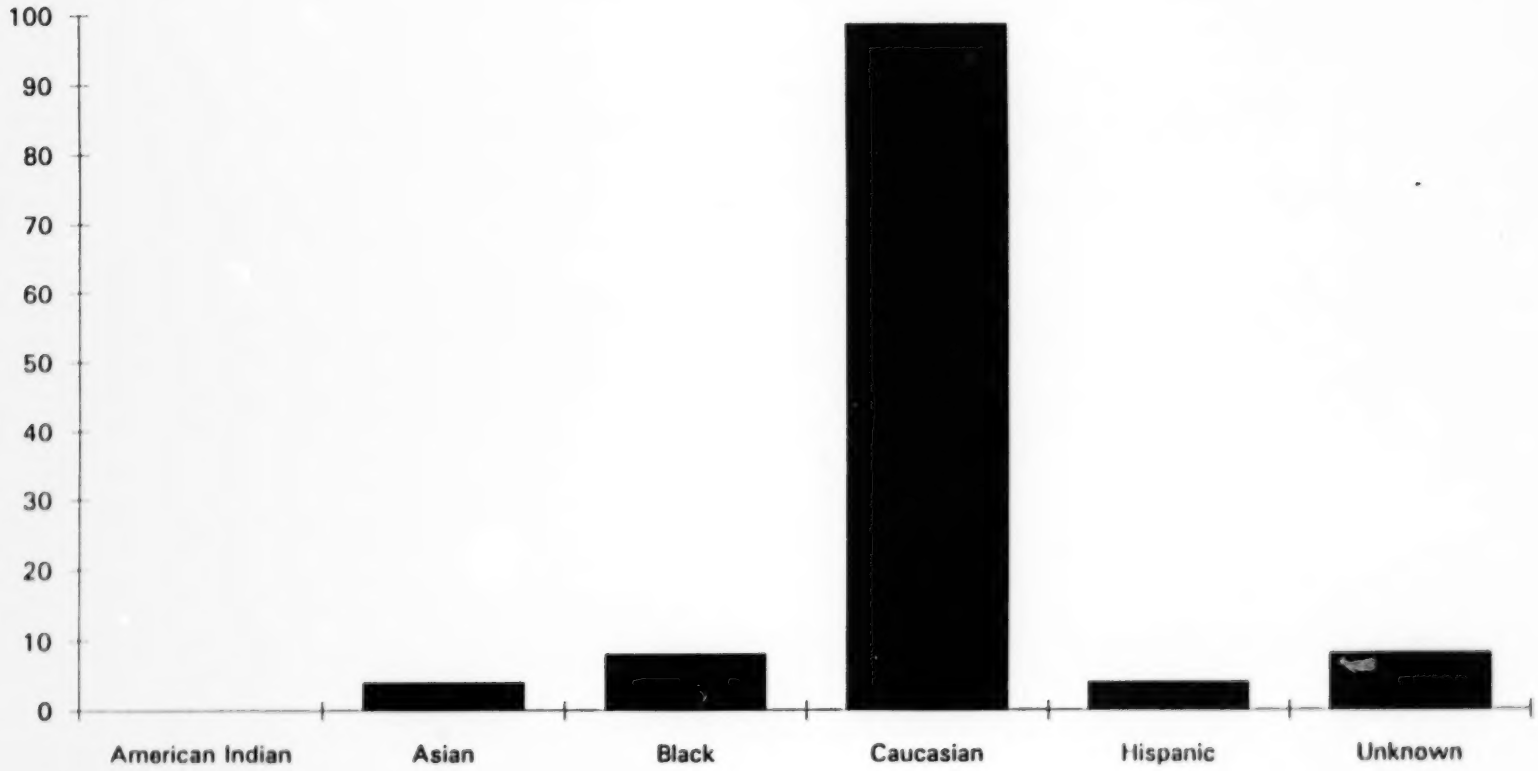
Age Profile of Female Students

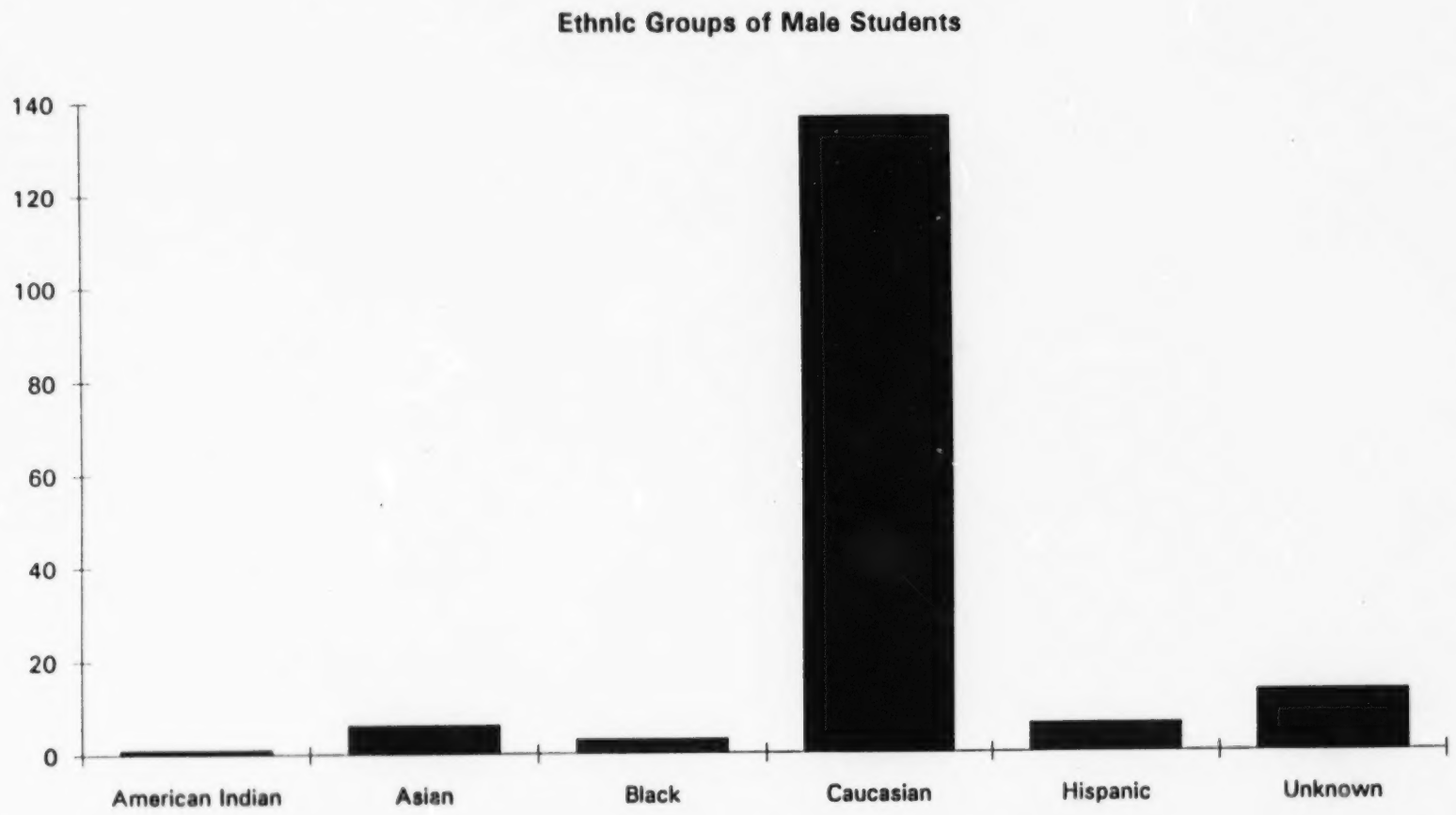


Age Profile of Male Students



Ethnic Profile of Female Students




Ethnic Groups of Male Students
140
120
100
80
60
40
20
0
American Indian
Asian
Black
Caucasian
Hispanic
Unknown

Who Else Might Benefit

Other populations with special needs and requiring more intensive counseling and job search skill training could be appropriately served through the Project Path model. These groups might include:

- Students with language barriers
- International Students
- Educationally disadvantaged students
- Economically disadvantaged students
- Returning older students
- Career changers

The Project Path Process

Strategies for Students

Individual Intake and Assessment

Each individual initially met one-on-one with the project coordinator. (Referrals to the program were either self-initiated or came from community agencies or on-campus offices.) During the intake process, the coordinator collected student demographics, the student's self-reported disabling condition, and a description of the individual's areas of difficulty and need. The student's academic and career goals were also explored. Simultaneously, an assessment of the individual was performed by the coordinator to determine an appropriate course of action.

The assessment was achieved through interview information provided by the student, parent, and/or referral source. After obtaining a "release of information" permit from the student, further diagnostic documentation was obtained from previous service providers or referral sources, if available. The type of documentation secured included:

- aptitude tests
- intelligence tests
- academic placement tests
- psychological tests
- neuropsychological tests
- medical tests
- other diagnostic information

Intake/Assessment (continued)

The sources for these diagnostic tools included:

- Department of Rehabilitation Services
- college testing office
- private and community rehabilitation agencies
- psychologists from both private and public agencies
- medical doctors
- LD specialists from both public schools and private agencies

(Following is the Intake/Assessment form we used.)

Ongoing Counseling

Counseling was provided on an ongoing basis to assist students in:

- problem solving college issues
- dealing with personal or social issues of concern
- determining a career goal
- exploring career issues
- developing a career strategy

Referral to Appropriate Services

Project Path students were referred to the appropriate resources on or off campus, once their needs were identified during the intake interview. On-campus support consisted of referrals to the following offices:

- Admissions
- Financial Aid
- Testing
- Registration
- Academic Advising
- Health and Special Services
- Learning Lab Skills Center

(The referral form we developed follows.)

Tutoring

Students who had a documented learning disability were eligible for one-on-one tutoring in their content area courses, if they needed it. This step became necessary in order for students to earn enough credits in their major field to meet the GPA requirement for doing a cooperative education experience (18 credits in their major field and a 2.0 (C) grade point average). Students followed the procedure below in obtaining tutoring:

- Provide documentation showing learning disability to Project Path staff
- Meet with Learning Disabilities Specialist for pre-planning conference to determine needs
- Set up regular tutoring sessions with content-area tutors
- Meet with LD Specialist and/or tutor at end of quarter to determine future needs

Students were funded for two (2) hours of tutoring per week. Deviations from this process were handled on a case-by-case basis.

(Tutoring referral form follows.)

Pre-Employment Skills Training

In order to prepare to do an independent job search, students needed to learn about the job search process and accomplish all the steps required to actually complete a career-related job search. Whether they were looking for a cooperative education placement or for permanent employment, students needed to create the necessary materials and address the following concepts:

- TheJob Search Process and Self-Assessment
- Resume Writing
- Interviewing Techniques
- Networking
- Job Maintenance Skills

After attempting to cover these topics in a scheduled, weekly seminar format, the staff determined that because students' disabilities were so diverse and because they were at such varied stages in their job searches, the most beneficial approach was an individual, one-on-one format. As each student reached readiness for a particular topic, the project coordinator presented that material in whatever format the student needed. In this way students could move through the job search process at their own pace and with whatever support they might need.

Following are some of the curriculum materials used in the pre-employment skills training segment of Project Path.

Cooperative Education Experiences

Cooperative Education is a program in which students earn academic credit for work experience directly related to their field of study. Like any other academic course, there is a faculty advisor, a syllabus (called a training agreement), evaluation of student performance, and grades. The difference is that the learning environment is the real world workplace rather than a classroom.

The cooperative education process seemed a natural fit for students with disabilities because it allowed them to try out a career in a safe learning environment before making final career decisions. It required them to reflect on their co-op work experience to determine if their career choices were a good fit for them or whether they needed to re-direct their energies in a new area. At the end of their co-op experiences (students were allowed to do as many as three), students were sure to have a clearer picture of what it is like to work in their chosen career field, plus, in some cases, as many as nine (9) months of actual on-the-job experience to take with them into the competitive market.

The following forms show how the co-op experience is documented; the *Student Handbook* is the guide students used to help them through their experiences.

Strategies for Employers

Since the ultimate goal for a Project Path student was employment, first through cooperative education experiences, then permanent, competitive placement, we felt it necessary to provide employers with as much information and support as possible to smooth the students' transition into the workplace. In order to inform employers of issues dealing with the hiring of people with disabilities and the Americans with Disabilities Act, we presented the following:

- One-day seminars on legal and employment issues
- Teleconferences on disability issues
- One-on-one conferencing with the Project Path Employment Marketing Coordinator
- Worksite visits by the Project Path Coordinator
- An *Employer Resource Manual*
- The *Project Path Employers Manual*

Copies of the above named manuals and program agendas follow.

Strategies for Faculty

In order to assist faculty members in their work with students with disabilities, Project Path employed a number of strategies. It is important to note that arrangements for accommodation in the classroom are handled through the Office of Health and Special Services, so the efforts of Project Path were directed in other ways, providing:

- Faculty in-service seminars on "Identifying and Dealing with Learning Disabled Students in the Classroom" (As a part of this seminar, faculty created projects dealing with some aspect of disability in the classroom which they then shared with their colleagues in the class and in their departments.)
- One-on-one consultation with Project Path staff and LD and content area tutors
- Resource materials covering a variety of ways to modify instruction for students with disabilities
- Information on seminars and teleconferences dealing with disability issues and the ADA legislation
- Participation in career development plans for their students with disabilities

Copies of some of the materials we provided to faculty follow.

Strategies for Cooperating Agencies

One of the greatest resources for Project Path was the collaboration with community organizations, including private and not-for-profit. Some collaborations were in an effort to meet the personal and social needs of the Project Path student, some to educate the individual, and some for the purpose of networking and marketing the efforts of the project. The cooperating agencies also served as off-campus referral sources, sending potential students to Project Path, if appropriate, as well as receiving Project Path students for services.

The primary strategy for initiating interactions with these agencies was to make numerous group presentations before employers, social service providers, civic groups, educators, parents and students. Each audience presented its own unique set of needs, concerns, and questions which project staff tried to address specifically. Another methodology was to meet one-on-one with representatives from these same audiences. In either case, we were able to set up connections with the various agencies to enhance their understanding of our process and goals and to work together to serve the students' needs.

The list of those collaborating agencies included:

- Illinois Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS)
- States of Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES)
- Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA)
- Programs with Industry (PIC)
- DuPage County Government Offices (i.e., Human Services, Human Resources)
- Illinois Department of Public Aid
- DuPage County Transition Planning Council
- Social Security Administration
- Civic Organizations (i.e., Lions, Rotary, etc.)
- District High School Special Education Programs
- Private Social Service Agencies
- Professional Organizations (i.e., AHEAD, NRA, JPD, etc.)
- President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities

MARKETING PROJECT PATH

In developing the program and making it operational, we felt it necessary to get the word out to a number of on- and off-campus agencies with whom we needed to collaborate, in addition to making the students aware of the services and processes that were now available to them.

We began by meeting with the on-campus staffs of the offices with whom we needed to collaborate. These groups included:

- Health and Special Services
- Developmental Learning Lab and Skills Center
- Counseling Office
- Testing Office
- Admissions Office

Our purpose in meeting with these groups was to introduce the Project Path process and goals to them and to work out ways in which we could complement each others' efforts. We also looked to these offices to send us referrals and we needed to be able to send referrals to them. These introductory efforts became invaluable and allowed the students to receive a more comprehensive range of services through a coordinated process based on their needs.

Our second step was to take a similar approach with off-campus agencies with whom we needed to collaborate. Following the same emphases as we used with on-campus services, we made presentations about Project Path to the community agencies listed earlier.

To reach the students we hoped to serve, we disseminated information on the project as follows:

- made hundreds of classroom presentations, on campus and at area high schools, highlighting the services available
- placed brochures in all information racks throughout the college and at appropriate community agencies
- wrote articles for school and community newspapers
- provided information at new student orientation sessions, college night events, career fairs
- placed posters on bulletin boards and in classrooms throughout the college
- integrated project information into all existing cooperative education materials, the college advising handbook, quarterly schedule of classes, and the information request cards sent to employers

Marketing Materials

Print Materials:

The brochure we designed to market the project to all audiences follows. It was used to describe the program to students, employers, secondary school personnel, college personnel, and other interested parties. The interchangeable cards allowed us to tailor the information to meet the needs of the recipient.

The *Project Path Employer Handbook* was published as a resource for employers who were unfamiliar with the cooperative education process or who had never worked with our co-op program previously. As you can see in the sample which follows, it gives the employer an overview of co-op and the employer's forms and responsibilities.

The Project Path folder was used primarily for distribution of materials to faculty, staff, employers, and to anyone requesting information about the program.

Copies of these materials follow.

Video:

Early in the program we created a videotape describing the program and process. We highlighted students who were working in the program, along with the staff. The video was designed to describe the program to a general audience and was available in both regular and close captioned formats. We used this video in many of our class and community presentations.

Trinkets:

Throughout the life of the grant, we did offer some "give-aways" as a way of getting our name in front of numbers of people. We gave away pens with out project name and design on them at college fairs and various information booths; we had cups made and distributed to employers, administrators, and faculty who worked with our program.